THE MIDDLEBURY MURDER

Wherein Astro the Seer Shows His Ability as a Real Detective



"Don't Arrest Her! Please Don't!" Shrieked the Elevator Boy.

BY ALAN BRAGHAMPTON

Drawing by George Brehm

IT was just after midnight when Astro's green brougham, bringing him, with Valeska, his assistant, up town, was stopped so suddenly that both were nearly thrown off the seat. They were driving along Canal-st., and, as the vicinity was apparently deserted, the Seer of Secrets looked in surprise from the window to see what was the matter.

A police officer was speaking in tones of command to the driver. Astro, recognizing him as Lieutenant McGraw, smiled in relief. The police officer came to the window with his hat in his hand.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I recognized your cab; so I just ordered your man to stop. I wanted to speak to you a moment. Ah, Miss Wynne, it's glad I am to see you!"

Valeska gave him her hand and a smile.

"I've just been called from the office," said McGraw, "on a case that may be interesting, as I know how you like mysteries. Perhaps you might help me out, even." And Officer McGraw winked elaborately. "When it comes to giving a crook the third degree, or raiding a joint, I'm there with the goods; but this looks like a murder, and murders are sometimes—"

"I see," said Astro suavely. "Well, if you can crowd in here, we'll go with you. Where is it?"

"Just round the corner, here, at the Aspenwall Building on Grand-st." And, after Astro had given the order to the driver, McGraw went on. "You see, the night watchman has just telephoned for an officer, as something suspicious has happened. He seemed excited, and it may turn out something doing, or it may not."

"Well, I'll be glad to be first on the ground, at any rate," said Astro. "That ought to make it easier to solve, if it should happen to be a mystery."

HE had scarcely finished when the brougham drew up at the entrance to the Aspenwall Building. A full bearded man in jumper and overalls was waiting scowling in the doorway. He came immediately forward.

"There's a murder or a suicide been committed here, I'm afraid," he began; "but I didn't want to do anything till I had the police, to be on the safe side. It's up on the tenth story, in Mr. Middlebury's office."

"Has anyone left the building since you telephoned?"

"No, I made sure of that. The elevator boy thought he heard a shot fired, and I went around to all the lighted offices. They were all right except at Middlebury's office, where there was no answer when I knocked."

"How many tenants are in the building now?"

"There have only been two or three here to-night, and some went before this thing happened. There's only one I know of,—Mr. Moffett, on the ninth. I think he's there yet. I spoke to him a little while ago."

"Better ring for a couple more men, McGraw," said Astro.

After the party had entered the corridor, McGraw rang up the office, then returned to the elevator. The boy had just come out, and was standing with white, scared face in the corridor. He was a thin, anemic youth of eighteen, with red hair and roving, pale blue eyes with dilated pupils.

"Now, young fellow," said McGraw, "what do you know about this?"

"Nothing, sir. Only I thought I heard a shot fired, and I called Thompson."

"You didn't go up yourself?"

"No, only to take Thompson. I waited in the car while he knocked on the door."

"Where did you find Thompson?"

"On the fifth floor. I went down to the boiler room at first, thinking he was there; then I tried each floor till I found him."

"What time did you hear the report?"

"About half past eleven o'clock."

"How many people have you taken up on the elevator this evening?"

"Only one or two. Mr. Moffett went up to his office on the ninth at eight o'clock or so,—he must be there now,—Mr. Smythe, on the fourth; but he left at ten o'clock, about. I don't remember the others."

Astro now turned to the night watchman, Thompson, a heavy set, hairy man, who stood with his mouth open, listening as if fascinated.

"What have you been doing this evening, Thompson?"

"Why, I had a bite of lunch in the boiler room at about eight o'clock. Then at nine I made my rounds to see if everything was all right. I have to look for signs of fires or burglars or anything wrong, you know."

"How many offices were lighted up?"

"Smythe's and Moffett's and Mr. Middlebury's; that's all I remember, sir."

"Where were you when this boy called you?"

"On the stairs, going up to the sixth floor."

"This is the only elevator running at night?"

"Yes, sir. I'm supposed to keep run of this boy and see he stays till midnight."

At this moment two officers appeared at the entrance. Astro turned to McGraw. "Tell them to keep hidden outside," he said, "and nab anyone leaving the building. Now we'll go up and see what has happened."

AS the five entered the car, Astro, whose look had fallen upon the rubber matting on the floor, moved over nearer the elevator boy, and, pushing him a little aside, picked up a slip of paper on which he had been standing. It proved to be blank, however; but the Seer put it away in his pocketbook. The boy slammed the door and the car started up the shaft. Astro touched the boy's arm.

"Stop at the ninth floor!" he commanded.

The elevator boy looked up in surprise; but pulled the lever and threw open the hall door.

"You wait here," said Astro to Thompson and the lad. "Come on, McGraw. We'll see Moffett first."

They walked down the hall and round a corner till they came to a lighted door. Astro, without knocking, threw the door wide open. It was a small room, and at a rolltop desk a man jumped up quickly in consternation. In one hand he held a revolver, in the other a cleaning instrument. A box of cartridges was open beside him. He stared at his unexpected visitors.

"Good evening, Mr. Moffett," said Astro. "What are you doing with that pistol?"

"Why—I'm—cleaning it," said Moffett. The pistol dropped from his hand as he spoke, and he turned white at the scrutiny of his interlocutor.

The Seer gazed for a moment without speaking at the small, smooth shaven, anxious looking man who confronted him. He wore iron spectacles and was shabbily dressed. His thin, bony hands trembled visibly.

"Did you fire that pistol this evening?"

"Why, no—of course not!"

"What were you cleaning it for?"

"Why—I always carry it when I go home. I live out at Kingsbridge, and there have been so many hold-ups—"

"Did you hear a shot fired in this building to-night?"

"Good God, no!" Moffett's alarm increased. He put his hand to his head. "You don't mean—there's anything happened?" he faltered.

Instead of answering, Astro walked over, picked up the revolver from the floor, and examined it. The chambers were empty. Next, he looked at the box of cartridges. Five were missing. Of these, four were scattered on the desk.

"When did you fire this gun last?" he demanded.

"Last night—at a cat," said Moffett.

McGraw laughed aloud.

Astro went to the window, threw up the sash, and looked out. The roof of the adjoining building was only two stories below. He gave it a glance, then lowered the window and walked to the door.

"Will I bring him along, sir?" said McGraw.

"No, leave him alone. Mr. Moffett, remain here till we come for you, please." And with that, Astro went out. In the hall he turned to McGraw.

"You don't mind my taking charge of this?" he asked.

"You bet I don't!" McGraw exclaimed. "But I don't see why you want Moffett to make a getaway."

"He can't get past the men down stairs, can he?"

"That's right. But did you see any empty cartridge shells on the roof below?"

"No. But we'll have to examine the roof later. Now we'll go up to Middlebury's office. We've lost too much time already."

HAVE you a key to Middlebury's office, Thompson?" he asked on reëntering the elevator.

"No, sir. Mr. Middlebury lost one of his office keys this week, and was given the duplicate the superin-

tendent had till another one could be made for him."

"What did he need two for?"

"For his stenographer, I believe," said Thompson.

"Oh, he had a typewriter, then?" said Astro.

The elevator boy interrupted. "He had one, but she left to-day."

"How do you know that?" Astro turned to the youth with a keen gaze.

The elevator boy cowered under his inspection. "Why—she told me so, that's all."

The elevator had reached the tenth floor and stopped. The boy threw open the door and the party stepped out.

Almost opposite the elevator, across a narrow hall, appeared a lighted door, on which was painted the legend: "John Middlebury, Architect and Civil Engineer." Above it was a transom tilted half open.

"Give me a leg up," said Astro, and, placing his foot on Thompson's big hand, he raised himself to the height of the lintel and looked in. He stayed there for a few minutes, then dropped to the floor again.

"Well, it's a murder, fast enough," he said to McGraw.

"We'll have to bust down the door, then," said the officer.

"Unless the boy can crawl through the transom."

"No, I can't!" exclaimed the boy. "It's too narrow."

"You try it," said Astro.

"I don't dare to!" the lad whimpered.

McGraw laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. "Now, then, my son, go to it, and no talk!"

With that, he lifted the lad bodily to a handhold on the lintel. "Hurry up, now, Dennis!" said Thomson gruffly, and the boy struggled through the opening, pulled his legs inside, and dropped to the floor. In a moment he opened the door and stood as white as paper, trembling in horror.

BEYOND a counter that shut off the front part of the office, below a large drafting table in the center of the room, the body of a man lay on its back, the arms outstretched on the floor. The eyes were shut, and one hand still held a small black rubber drawing triangle. The counter shut off the sight of his feet. He was a man of some thirty years, with black mustache and sparse beard, a handsome, picturesque type of slightly foreign appearance.

Astro passed through the little door in the counter with McGraw, and together they bent over the body.

"There's no blood at all!" said the officer in amazement. "What is it, anyway? He can't be shot!"

Astro made no reply for some moments, but examined every detail of the body with care. At last he rose. "Thompson," he said, "have you a gun?"

"Why, no, sir!" Thompson spoke anxiously. "At least, I ain't got any with me. I got one down in the boiler room, though. I don't carry it all the time, sir."

"Go down and get it!" Astro spoke sharply. "Bring it to me! No, Dennis, you stay right here. Thompson, take the elevator down yourself. Tell the officers to telephone for a doctor."

The watchman left without a word, shaking his head. The elevator boy sat down on a chair outside the counter and gazed dismally into the corridor.

Astro stood for several minutes silently looking about the room. His eyes went from the drawing board, where the perspective view of a country residence had been roughly sketched in pencil, past the ground glass windows which admitted light from a side hall opposite the elevator, to the doors of an inner room. Valeska's eyes followed his in careful search of the room. McGraw still stared in amazement at the body, looking for some sign of a bullet wound, but without success.

"He's dead, all right," he said finally; "but hanged if I can see what killed him! Could it be suicide? Perhaps we can find some poison, somewhere. Look in the dressing room."

"He's shot," said Astro, without looking at the corpse. "Valeska, see what you can find in the private office in there." He pointed to the inner door.

As she started to go in through the door in the counter, her foot struck a strip of cardboard that shot in along the floor. Astro glanced at it, then stooped and picked up an advertising calendar. He walked to the waiting space outside and began to examine the wall carefully. The elevator boy's eyes followed him listlessly. The Seer stopped near the hall door and fixed his eyes on a small hole in the woodwork. Then he went back to the drawing board and examined it attentively. There was a large black blot on it where evidently a bottle of India ink had been spilled. The paper was fastened down with thumb tacks in the form of wire spirals. He drew one out and put it into his pocket.

SUDDENLY Valeska called out, "There has been a woman in here to-night!"

Astro and McGraw hurried into the private office. Valeska was standing by a small set bowl in the corner and held up a tiny gold ring.

"Do you see?" she exclaimed. "The bowl is full of soapsuds and dirty water. She must have left in a hurry without stopping for her ring."

Astro examined it, took a long look about the room, tried the private door that led to the branch hall, and then went back to the architect's office. "What was Mr. Middlebury's stenographer's name?" he asked of the elevator boy.

"Miss Wilson." Dennis looked up with a look of alarm.

"What time did you take her up in the elevator?"

"I didn't take her up at all, to-night!" was the response; but his eye wandered away from his examiner.

"When did you see her last?"

"When she left here, at five o'clock."

"It's queer she should leave her ring here, then, and dirty water in the bowl."

"Perhaps it was another woman," the boy ventured.

"Perhaps it was. Did you carry up any other?'

"Why, I think I did; but I can't quite remember. I think she went out again, though."

"You have a remarkably poor memory," said Astro acidly.

The door was now flung open again, and Thompson

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LUCY ELLEN MONOLOGUES — ON PREACHIN'

By Ida Little Pifer

MISTAH WASH'N he do preach pow'ful sermons. You's seen Mistah Wash'n, isn't yo'? He looks same as a hawg. The fat hang down on this side of his face an' on this side of his face, an' a gre't bunch of it a-hangin' undeh his chin.

Preachah's they has the easies' time of anybody. They cain't be preachah's 'thout the Lawd calls 'em, an' then He jes' stan's ahind 'em an' puts the words in they moufs, an' all they's got to do is to holler 'em out

I don't jes' un'e'stan', but preachahs they don' git things right all the time. Now, I 'membehs onct Bre'r Jeremiah was a-preachin'. Bre'r Jeremiah he's ejicated. He looks mos' lak a white pusson. Well, Bre'r Jeremiah he went on to tell 'bout somebody that was wukkin' in a gyarden, an' fu'st he say, "In the bahnyahd of de Lawd, breth'n"; an' Moses Dangerfield—yo' knows Mose—he hollers out:

"No, Bre'r Jeremiah, dat ain't right!"

"In de boneyahd of the Lawd," says Bre'r Jeremiah.

"No, Bre'r Jeremiah, dat ain't right yit!"

An' Bre'r Jeremiah he didn't lak that, an' he says, "Well, Bre'r Moses," says he, "if yo' knows 'bout dat, yo' jes' tell how 'tis yo'self," says Bre'r Jeremiah.

"In de vineyahd of de Lawd!" hollered out Moses jes' lak he knows what's right.

An' Bre'r Jeremiah says re-el polite, lak this, bendin' oveh, an' holdin' hes han' on his stummick, "Yo's right, Bre'r Moses; I'se c'rected."

But Bre'r Jeremiah he ain't got no use for Bre'r Moses afteh that. Now, I can't jes' un'e'stan' how the Lawd come to git things wrong that way. But I 'spect Ole Sattin had somethin' to do wif that.

Yas'm, I cert'n'y loves to heah Mistah Wash'n. I 'membehs one suhmon he preached. Well, it was a won'e'ful suhmon, it was. It was 'bout two pussons named Eve an' Adam. They lived in a gyarden, an' they didn't weah no cloes. One day they wanted to go out some'ers whah they'd meet people, an' the woman she made clo'es out'n fig leaves. They was a-growin' on a li'l tree jes' lak that li'l fig bush down by the sho', whah the folks roun' yere allus picks off the figs 'fore they gits ripe—an' yo' never gits any. Well, Mistah Wash'n he tell it so plain I could mos' see jes' how it looked. Mistah Wash'n he tuk out his han'k'ch'ef an' wukked a pencil back an' fo'th on it lak he's sewin' fig leaves, to show how the woman was a-settin' thah sewin', an' the man was a-stan'in' lookin' on, an' the chile a-layin' thah a-sleepin. An' when the woman got the fig leaves sewed, she said re-el loud an' deep, lak this, "Son, heah is yo' clo'es!"

MISTAH PERRY he's 'nothah pow'ful preachah. Yo' 'membahs that Sunday when I went to chu'ch Sunday mawnin' an' never got back till Tuesday? Well, that's the night he preached all night, an' 'g'in Monday all endurin' the day. No'm, nobody could



Mistah Perry Was Rippin' and Teahin' Roun'.

git sleepy the way they was all a-cah'yin' on, an' Mistah Perry rippin' an' teahin' roun' an' poun'in' the big Bible wif hes han's lak he gwine to bust right thoo! He had a big picture on the wall ahind him of a Christian dyin' peaceful an' happy, wif li'l angels all a-flutterin' roun' him. My! but it was a pretty picture! An' on the otheh side was a sinnah a-dyin' an' jes' a-fightin' away a gre't passel of li'l debbils that was a'-clawin roun' tryin' to git him. They all had li'l things on they backs that looked lak sails to a boat.

I cert'n'y don' wanter to die that a-way. I wants to go to Heaben. Does yo' know 'bout Heaben? Well, they say Heaben is a gre't big green fiel', slopin' up f'um a crik, jes' same as if yo's gwine oveh Linsale crik, an' on the otheh side yo' could see the green grass a-growin', an' heah the birds a-singin', an' see the peoples walkin' roun', happy, wif nothin' to do, an' all they wants to eat,—jes' pickin' it right off'n the trees an' the groun', without wukkin! They do say that peoples this side of the crik they tries to build bridges to git 'cross, an' the bridges wash away, an' they th'oes money in, an' tries to buy they way 'cross, an' they tries ev'ry way to git oveh that crik; but the onlies' way they kin git to Heaben is to git 'ligion 'fore they dies.

No'ndeed'm, the preachahs never says nothin' 'bout lyin' an' stealin' an' them things. They jes' preaches 'bout gittin' 'ligion an' gittin' saved, an' how to git to Heaben, an' keepin' way f'um the fire an' Ole Sattin.

BUT the bes' suhmon I ever heard was the day of the big stawm, when the trees blowed down, an' that oysteh boat washed asho' at Sandy P'int, wif the men mos' drownded. It was Sunday mawnin', I 'membehs, an' Mistah Perry was a-preachin', an' the thun'eh 'gin to growl, low down in its throat, an it was gittin' dahk lak it was night. Some of the peoples stahted fo' home; but Maw she says if she's gwine to git killed, she's gwine to stay right whah the Lawd kin reach down an' git huh; but she did wish she knowed them li'l tukkeys was under the shed.

An' the lightnin' was a-streakin' 'cross the ribber, an' the thun'eh a-growlin' an' a-bellerin', an' it blowed—my! but it did blow! an' the wa'es a-bang-in' up ag'in' the sho'! Ev'rybody was a-gittin' skyart, an' the chillun was a-squallin' an' the women a-cryin', an' the men a-prayin' an' groanin' an' a-callin' on the Lawd to forgive 'em of they sins. An' Mistah Perry was a-smackin' he hands an' rollin' up he eyes, an' teahin' back an' fo'th, a-hol-lerin':

"The Day of Jedgment is a-comin'! The Day of Jedgment is a-comin'! Sinnahs, look out! A streak of lightnin' in the east an' a streak of lightnin' in the west, an' a streak of lightnin' oveh top, an' Gawd a-comin' right down in the middle!"

My, oh my! yo' jes' oughter seen them people! They was so much noise yo' couldn't heah nothin', an' it was so dark yo' couldn't see nothin', an' the peoples was a-th'owin' the'-selves on the flo' an' hollerin' an' cah'yin' on, so's yo' couldn't tell what was gwine to happen. But shore nuff, somethin' did happen! Yo' knows that big holly tree, 'bout a thousand yeahs ole, higher'n them pine trees, an' so big that ole Uncle Frank couldn't reach roun' it wif both hes ahms? Well, that's the time that holly tree fell oveh an' come a-clappin' down on the chu'ch. The people was jes too skyart to holler. All at onct it was so still in that chu'ch yo' could heah 'em breathin'. Mistah Perry he drap down on his knees in a kind of a round lump, an' he stahts to singin', real soft, "Lawd, save or I perish! Lawd, save or I perish!" an' ev'rybody else kneels down too, an' jines in, an' keeps a-gittin' loudeh an' loudeh, till I thinks they's gwine to shake the shingles off the top of that thah chu'ch.

An' then the sun jes' bust right in the windows, an' the lightnin' an' the thun'eh stopped, an' afteh awhiles comes a big rainbow oveh the ribber, an' the trees was a-spanglin' in the sunshine.

Yas'm, that's what they calls gettin' an answer to prayers. 'Tain't ev'rybody kin git they prayers answered; but Mistah Perry cert'ny is a pow'ful preachah!

twirling the smoking weapon on his thumbs.

"'Take a breather, *chico bailarino mio*,' he cried out to the boy, 'an' then we'll put you through another four-gun clog!'

BUT Isador Stein did not stop dancing. Dropping his folded arms to his sides, he allowed the skirt of the duster to flutter about his flying feet. He danced back for a moment to the cluster of silent men at the doorway, revolving dizzily in a double pirouette; then he flashed about on Moran and Scoville with a weapon in each hand.

"A steady stream of flame leaped from the muzzles of the two short .38's, the boy jigging from side to side, light as a bobbin of thistledown, the air about him thickening with smoke.

"Instantly there was a plunging scramble from all sides, men dropping under chairs and tables and springing behind the bar. As fast as the boy emptied one pair of guns in his bewildering, cannonading dance, he whipped another pair from the turned in pockets of his duster. Scoville and Moran had staggered back toward the rear of the room, their every effort to dodge the boy being blocked by his wonderful agility.

"The discharge of one of those crazy little muzzle-loaders, thrust out within two feet of Duckhead Scoville's nose, caused him to emit a sharp bellow, slump flat on his back, and lie still. Then, with two more of those antique, double-charged little weapons in his hands, Isador Stein, jigging from side to side like a smoke-wound wraith, bore down upon Moran and snapped the triggers. The resultant explosion seemed to split the roof. At the burst of fire in his whiskers Moran gave a wild yell and sprawled over on his side inert as a sack of meal.

WHEN Jimmy Perkins, Cassidy, and Hobbs rode their ponies through the swinging doors, The Parlor was empty save for the two still masses of bad men on the floor, vaguely visible, like unwholesome specters, through the reek of powder smoke, and the Whirling Dervish figure of Isador Stein. The boy was reeling and spinning like a mad thing and juggling his weird little arsenal of curio guns above his head with the most amazing ingenuity of gesture.

"He continued this pantomime until Scoville's body suddenly twitched and the great torso lurched up in a sitting position, one big hairy hand shielding his eyes and the other groping along the floor for some weapon. Moran came to his senses like a startled toad, lifted first his face and singed beard, twitched his shoulders furtively like an alarmed weasel, and finally dragged himself up by a table. Both Moran and Scoville seemed amazed at the fact of being alive Swaying and blinking, they watched the whirling, dancing boy as if he was some amazing phantom of a perplexing dream.

"Suddenly the young 'un stopped dancing and flung round on the dazed and bewildered pair. 'Thought youse was murdered?' he said viciously. 'Guess them wax pills stung like hot lead. All shot to pieces wit' wax wads? Hextry! Hextry! A wax murder in Gallup! Wax wads, that's all they was. But keep them paws down. There's some o' these Sandy Claus toys in me jeans that carries more'n wax slugs. Looker here!'

"The lad's feet sprang into motion again and with a swift as light gesture he whipped from the turned-in pockets of the duster two highly polished .38's, tossed them up, caught them pat in his long fingers, and, gliding with dizzy speed along the bar, shot away the thin necks of a row of wine bottles. Then he stopped dancing, coming down from toe to heel slow and deliberate. Lowering the smoking barrels of the .38's, he turned upon the still dazed and stupefied pair of bullies, his teeth snapping, his breath coming short and fast, his eyes showing a dull red fire in their depths.

"'There's gold and silver in the faro and roulette racks an' back o' the bar,' he burst out shrilly, 'an' here's where Isador Stein digs in an' helps hisself jes' as youse did ter me the day I sags down the steps o' that caboose! Me friends,' turning to Jimmy Perkins, Hobbs, and Cassidy, 'kin'ly cock them Winchesters an' point 'em at them two large parties you seen come up off the floor, while I stow this antique hardware and do a little trick of cleanin' up all the loose change in sight!' whereat he went most vigorously and thoroughly to work.

"What gold and silver he couldn't cram into his own pockets he stuffed into the pockets of Hobbs and Cassidy, and, when he had diligently raked floor, tables, and counters bare to the last Mexican copper, he drew from some inner fold of his garments a large, painfully lettered document and spread it on the bar.

"'Me receipted bill, gents,' he said as he edged near the entrance, scarce able to stand with the weight of coin in his clothing. 'Hope youse enjoyed me tenderfoot brangle!' he shouted through the swinging doors as he went out.

SOMEHOW," sighed Cantilever Jones, nodding at Baldy Peters, "Scoville and Moran never seemed so awfully bad after that. Leastwise, they were no longer the Two Bad Men of Gallup. They moved from Gallup, I think, the day after that little affair in The Parlor. They'd no sense of humor, you see. Couldn't stand being joshed.

"And I hear Scoville has joined the Salvation Army down in Tucson, while Moran has entered the Mormon church and is tutor and guide to a flock of Angora goats up in the hills back of St. Joseph."

The Middlebury Murder

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appeared. He showed signs of the greatest distress, his eyes staring, and his mouth lax.

"The gun has gone!" he exclaimed, and stood gazing helplessly at McGraw.

"It has! Then I'll have to arrest you," said the officer, and he took a pair of handcuffs from his pocket. "Hold out your hands, my man!"

Astro apparently paid no attention to this scene, and walked again into the office and stood looking at the body. "You'd better get Moffett and take them both down stairs. I'll look about a bit. When the doctor comes, send him up. Send some one to look at the roof under Moffett's window to see if he can find an empty cartridge. Keep a watch out yourself for anyone going down stairs."

WHEN McGraw had gone with his prisoner, Valeska approached the Seer and gazed timidly at the body of Middlebury.

"Look at his left eye," said Astro soberly.

Valeska shudderingly did so. "There's the tiniest drop of blood there!" she exclaimed. "It's a strange case and would puzzle anyone who hadn't brains. I wonder what poor old McGraw would have done alone?"

Astro smiled grimly.

"Do you know who did it?" Valeska asked breathlessly.

"Of course."

"What, already? It seems impossible. There are three persons to suspect, aren't there?"

"Who are they?"

"Why, Moffett and the watchman and the mysterious woman who was undoubtedly here to-night."

"That woman is still in the building. I saw her hiding by a corner of the stairway as we came up; but didn't mention it, as I knew the men below would get her if she attempted to escape."

"Which one did it, then?"

"That's what I shall have to prove before I leave the building. I'm sure enough; but I need evidence. Just at present what worries me is, How did that calendar happen to fall down from the wall where it was fastened with one of these spiral thumbtacks?" He pointed to those on the drawing board.

At this moment they heard the bell of the elevator, which now was standing at the floor below while McGraw made his second arrest, begin to ring furiously. Astro ran out into the hall and listened. In a moment McGraw entered the car with his two men, and the car descended. The dial in front of the shaft showed its descent to the fifth floor; then the marker stopped.

Astro pointed to it. "They've captured the girl," he said. "We'll wait for Miss Wilson in the office; I'm not through with my investigation yet."

He walked rapidly back, passed the body, and reëntered the private office. Sitting down at the desk in the corner, he began a rapid investigation of the pigeonholes. Suddenly he held up a letter and envelop, on which was printed the words, "James Moffett, Aspenwall Bldg., New York City." Opening this, he took out a letter and read it aloud:

"MY DEAR MIDDLEBURY.—I can't wait any longer for that money. You'll positively have to pay it by the 15th, or there'll be trouble for you sure. I'd like an immediate answer.

"J. MOFFETT."

"Looks bad for Moffett, doesn't it?" said the Seer, putting the note into his pocket. "But look at this! Here's something worse."

He had just opened a small drawer and looked in. As he spoke he held up a revolver. "One cartridge used. I'm sorry for Miss Wilson."

"And the night watchman's pistol yet to be accounted for!" said Valeska.

"Oh, I think I can account for that, all right," said Astro. "I'll locate that as soon as I get the time. Here comes the latest suspect. See what you make of her. You know women"

THE elevator door opened with a snap, and McGraw, holding a young woman by the wrist, entered the outer office. She was a pretty blonde, her eyes now red with weeping. She wore a neat blue tailor made suit and stylish hat. The elevator boy came in behind her and gazed at her hungrily.

"We found her on the fifth floor trying to get down," said McGraw. "She has acknowledged that she was up in Middlebury's office this evening."

Astro turned swiftly to the elevator boy. "What did you say you hadn't taken her up for?" he demanded.

"Oh, God! I knew she was up there; but I didn't take her up, she walked up stairs. I hoped she'd get away and nobody'd know. I thought she'd gone already."

"And you wanted to shield her? Why?"

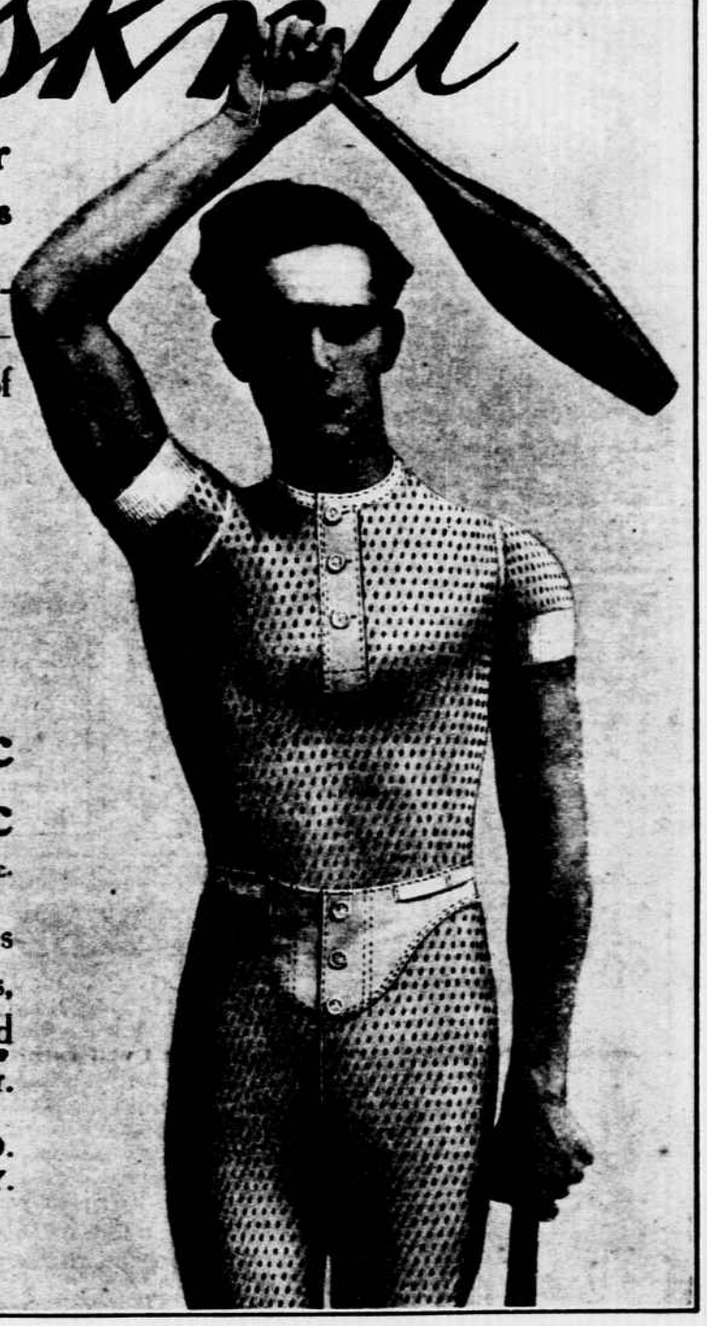
Dennis hung his head. Then he muttered shamefully, "Because I'm in love with her, sir, that's why! And I didn't want her to get into trouble. She didn't do it, sir. I'll swear she didn't shoot him!" He looked down at the body in horror, then turned his eyes away and began to sob hysterically.

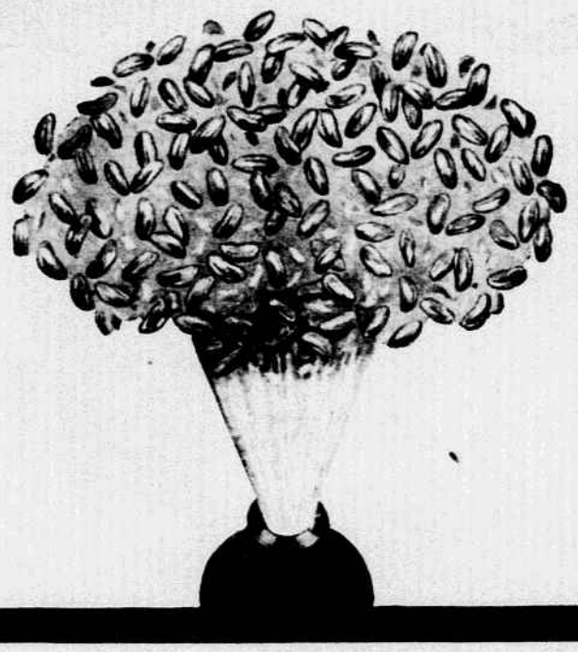
"Well, then, Miss Wilson, what have you to say for yourself?"

She had taken one look at the corpse also, and had turned away, her tears breaking forth afresh. Between her gasps she told her story.

"Mr. Middlebury was too attentive to me,



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I thought, and then yesterday he kissed me. He said he wanted to marry me; but I didn't believe it. So I told him I was going to leave. I did leave to-day, and never expected to come back here. Mr. Middlebury had paid me, and everything, only I found I had forgotten my house keys. So I had dinner down town and then came back here, because I knew Mr Middlebury would be working late alone in the office. I didn't want Dennis to know I went up, because I had told him about Mr. Middlebury's kissing me: so I waited till he went up in the elevator, and then I ran up stairs, trying to keep out of his sight. Only, he caught me halfway up. Besides, I had to hide from the night watchman, because he had had a quarrel with Mr Middlebury, and he thought I had complained of him "

"Oh, Thompson had quarreled with Middlebury, had he?" said McGraw meaningly.

"Yes, sir Middlebury had Thompson discharged He has to leave at the end of the week, and he was pretty angry about it. But I didn't have anything to do with that at all. It was on account of Thompson's refusing to let Mr. Middlebury have an extra key to the door."

"Where is Thompson?" Astro asked.

"Oh, he's safe enough with my men down on the first floor."

"Well, go ahead with your story, Miss Wilson "

"Why, Mr Middlebury was awfully nice and apologized for kissing me, and proposed to me again. I didn't know what to say to him; but I was afraid he didn't mean it and was up to some game with me. He tried to hold my hand, and I snatched it away so quick I upset a bottle of India ink he was using. So I went into his private office to wash my hands. While I was in there—" She covered her face with her hands.

"You took a revolver from the desk drawer?" said Astro.

She looked at him in amazement, with widely opened eyes. "A revolver? No! Of course not! I washed my hands at the bowl, and just as I was finishing I heard a pistol shot, and then I heard Mr Middlebury fall "

"Did you look into this office?"

"Oh no; I was so frightened I didn't dare to. I waited a minute till I heard the door slam: then I opened the door to the side hall and ran down stairs."

"You saw nobody?'

"Not a soul."

"Was the elevator there?"

"Oh, I didn't look. I only wanted to get away as fast as I could. I was afraid that I was going to be suspected and arrested. You see, I knew there was a pistol in the private office. for Mr. Middlebury had shown it to me one day I thought that if he threatened me I might use it to protect myself with."

"Yes, and that's exactly what you did do, I'm thinking," said McGraw gruffly

Valeska took Miss Wilson's hand affectionately and pressed it. "Don't be afraid, my dear " she said

Astro, calm and picturesque, the cape of his Inverness thrown negligently across his shoulder, scrutinized the girl keenly for a few moments His eyes passed over every detail of her costume, analyzed every feature. He was standing so, mysterious, potent, inscrutable, when his face changed suddenly "

"Do you remember, Miss Wilson, whether there was a small calendar pinned to the wall by the door there when you came in?"

She looked up, her eyes still streaming. "Why, yes, I'm sure there was That is, I stuck it to the wall with a thumbtack yesterday, and I don't remember its having been taken down " She looked at him in surprise at his question.

The door opened again, and the doctor, who had obtained a key to another of the elevators, coming up alone, entered the room and gave a curious look around.

"I'm Dr Flynn," he announced. What's the trouble?"

"There's your man," said Astro, pointing gravely to the body of Middlebury. "He's been dead an hour or so. You'll find he was shot through the eye. The bullet pierced the brain, and the man bled only internally. Lift his left eyelid and you'll see."

"That's more than I could find out," cried McGraw. "So he was shot, then for sure. Now, then, who done it?"

"We'll leave the doctor here to make his examination," said the Seer. "We'll take Miss Wilson down stairs. I'm about through, now. I promise you the criminal will confess before you can get the Coroner and the patrol wagon here."

LEAVING the doctor to his examination of the body, Astro and Valeska walked into the elevator, followed by McGraw, who still held Miss Wilson in his heavy grip. The elevator boy stepped in, shut the door, and the car descended. In the hall of the ground floor an officer was standing with Moffett, and another with Thompson, each of the prisoners being handcuffed. As Astro came up, another policeman hurried in from the front entrance.

"I've found the cartridge," he said, holding up the small copper cylinder. "It was not twenty feet away from Moffett's window, on the roof of the next building."

"Yes, I threw it out of the window. It was just before I cleaned the gun. I told you I shot a cat last night with it."

McGraw laughed in derision.

Astro looked Moffett over quietly and said, "I believe, Mr. Moffett, that Mr. Middlebury owed you some money, did he not?"

"Yes—why?" Then Moffett's face changed to terror

"And you threatened that he would have trouble if he didn't pay up, did you not?"

"By George! we got the man all right now!" said McGraw.

"I got my pay, though, only yesterday," exclaimed Moffett. "I believe I've got the receipt on me, even." He took out his pocketbook with trembling hands and looked through it eagerly. "Here it is!" he exclaimed in triumph, holding up the receipt.

"Which shows how dangerous it is to judge a man on circumstantial evidence," remarked Astro.

"Well, it's more than we got against the others," McGraw grumbled.

"My dear old chap, I'll show you circumstantial evidence enough to convince you, before I'm through. Besides that, I'll let you listen to an outright confession. Now you had better let Mr. Moffett depart in peace He's had a narrow escape. It's lucky some one with psychic perceptions was here to rescue him from the web of circumstance."

"It was the night watchman then, I'll bet on that!" said McGraw.

WELL, we'll take up his case next. Let's see he owed Middlebury a grudge for having him discharged. He had a pistol; but he can't produce it. What has he done with it?"

They had approached Thompson by this time. The night watchman was listening, trembling in his turn. His face had the color of clay.

"I kept it down cellar in my table drawer, near the foot of the elevator shaft. I have no idea what has become of it!" he pleaded.

Astro touched the officer who had been holding Moffett "Take the elevator and go down to the cellar. Open the door of the nearest furnace and look in and see if you can find a gun."

"Is it there?" said McGraw. "How in blazes did you know that, you wizard?"

"Where would you hide a gun better?" said Astro, smiling, "If it isn't there, you'll find it in some corner, or in one of the ash barrels. It doesn't matter much, anyway."

Valeska, meanwhile, was trying to comfort Miss Wilson, who was crying and talking intermittently. The two blondes made a pretty picture together. McGraw, who since his first visit to the Seer's studio had always admired Valeska Wynne, looked on, apparently touched.

"For God's sake, sir, it ain't the girl, is it?" he asked in a whisper.

Astro laughed, and waited. The elevator boy sat on a bench, a picture of dejection, waiting for the outcome. It was ten minutes before the officer reappeared from the basement. As he threw open the elevator door he showed, hanging from a bent wire, the distorted metal work of a revolver, still glowing a dull red.

"It was just where you said, sir," he explained.

Astro gave a glance at it, then turned to Thompson. "What have you to say?" he asked.

"I don't know how it got there," said Thompson dully.

"I believe this is your last week as watchman here?"

"Yes, sir."

"And it was Mr. Middlebury who caused your discharge?"

"Yes, sir." Thompson stared stupidly at his large feet.

"Then you had good reason to hate him? He is shot, and your revolver thrown into the furnace. It looks bad, my man!"

"I swear to God I'm innocent!" Thompson looked wildly into the impassive face of the Seer.

And, as he did so, Astro's face softened. "I believe you. I think you can take the handcuffs off him, McGraw."

"Take 'em off! Why, he must be the one who done it! Any fool could see that!"

"You're fool enough to, no doubt," said Astro, shrugging his shoulders; "but if you want the credit of detecting the murderer, you'd better free this man and listen to me."

Astro had proved his marvelous powers of deduction or intuition too many times, and too much to McGraw's own advantage, for the officer to refuse.

"It's sure too much for me!" he muttered to himself as he unlocked the iron bracelets.

WELL, now we'll have an interview with the real criminal," said Astro, walking over to the two girls.

Miss Wilson, hearing this, looked terrified at him; but there was no expression there that could reassure her. She opened her lips to speak, but could not.

Astro began deliberately, speaking so that his words echoed through the corridor. "Miss Wilson, by your own confession you were in the office of Mr. Middlebury at the time he was shot."

"In the inner office, I was," she ejaculated.

"In the inner office, where there was found a revolver with one cartridge used," added Astro.

The girl nodded her pale face.

"You have confessed to Dennis, here, that Mr Middlebury had kissed you and that you were offended. You have confessed that he made a proposal of marriage to-night that you suspected was false and only a game to fool you with."

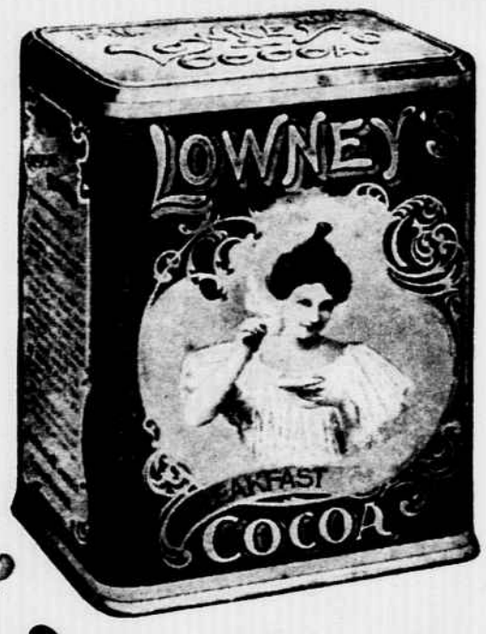
"Oh, but I'm sure now he was sincere!" Miss Wilson cried. "I am sure he loved me! I'm sorry I suspected him of anything ungentlemanly!"

"Nevertheless, there was a scuffle. He attempted to take your hand. You escaped to the inner room—where the revolver was kept."

"Only to wash my hands!" she wailed.

"Your story is too flimsy," said Astro, his voice suddenly grown harsh, as he turned to McGraw. "Officer, I charge Miss Wilson with the crime of murder! Arrest her and handcuff her!"

Valeska, who had sprung up in surprise and indignation, opened her lips to protest. McGraw, instead of moving forward, had taken a



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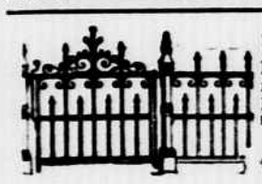
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step backward, when Dennis, the elevator boy, jumped up and seized Astro's arm.

"Don't arrest her, don't!" he shrieked. "I done it myself!"

"You done it?" McGraw echoed.

"Yes! Arrest me!" and the boy held out his wrists imploringly

ASTRO coolly took out his cigarette case and lighted a cigarette. "Well, McGraw," he said, smiling, "didn't I promise you a confession?"

McGraw, stupefied, clasped the handcuffs on Dennis' wrists. Miss Wilson fell, almost fainting, on the bench, where Valeska put her arm tenderly about her.

"Well, Dennis, you re fairly caught," said Astro. "I've known for sometime that you were guilty; but it's so much more satisfactory to have an out and out confession. Now I'll trouble you for the key to Middlebury's door" And, so saying, he reached into the boy's trousers pocket and brought forth a small Yale key.

"When did you find it, Dennis?"

"I found it last week, sir, on the floor of my car."

"And you kept it thinking it might come in handy, and perhaps get the night watchman into trouble, eh? So you were jealous of Mr Middlebury on Miss Wilson's account, were you?"

"Oh, it made me wild, sir! I just couldn't stand it when she told me he had kissed her, and when I saw her going up there to-night I went crazy"

"So you stole Thompson's gun from the cellar, went up when Thompson was on his rounds, opened the door with your key, and shot Mr. Middlebury?"

"Yes, sir!" Dennis' voice was faint

"Then you ran your car to the cellar, threw the gun into the furnace, then went up and found Thompson and told him you had heard a shot?"

"Yes, sir. Oh, I was crazy! I was crazy about her!"

"And you thought if you said nothing about her, she would escape?"

"Yes, sir. For God's sake, take me away! I don't ever want to see her again!"

"Patrol wagon's come, sir," said one of the officers, walking up to McGraw He laid his hand on Dennis' arm

"One minute, please," said Astro "Dennis, my boy, will you please hold up your left foot? Thank you!" And as the boy did so Astro removed a spiral wire thumbtack that was imbedded in the rubber heel of the boot.

"What's that for?" McGraw inquired,

"The law doesn't permit a defendant to plead guilty to a charge of murder. You may need this for evidence when the case is tried." As the elevator boy was led away he looked at him pityingly. "Cocaine," he remarked to McGraw.

"Sure. Dope done it, all right He was worked up to it. It may do for an insanity defense"

"He's a 'mattoid.' You'll find his parents or grandparents were criminals, poor devil!" The Seer turned to Miss Wilson "You've had a lucky escape, too, my dear It's fortunate that I was here."

"Oh, I don't know how to say how grateful I am!" she exclaimed.

"We'll drive you home," Valeska volunteered "I know this shock has been terrible for you. Do come with us!"

SHE drew the girl toward the doorway and they bade goodnight to McGraw As Astro and the officer waited talking for a moment, the girls entered the green brougham. But, hardly in, Valeska returned to the doorway hurriedly. McGraw had gone inside.

"I can't wait till we've left Miss Wilson," she said. "Do please let me see that paper you picked up in the elevator I think I see where you got your first clue, now Dennis, the elevator boy, had stepped on it, hadn't he?"

Astro took the paper from his pocketbook and handed it to his assistant. Faintly indented on its surface was a small spiral

The next "Seer of Secrets" story, "The Vengeance of the Pi Ro Nu," will appear May 9.

THE BLIND PASSION

"My love is like a red, red rose!"
I sing 'mid visions hazy;
I'm fancy smitten, I suppose,
And when one's that way, goodness knows
He's just the same as crazy!
Perhaps she's no more like a rose
Than I am like a daisy.

"Her eyes shine like the stars of night!"
My fancy goes a-sighing.
But I'm in love and "not just right"
(To say that sounds much more polite
Than that I'm falsifying).
Perhaps they don't shine near so bright
As stars do when they're trying.

"Her neck is like the graceful swan's!"
I hear myself alleging;
But I'm in love, and truth absconds,
And facts become strange vagabonds,
When one his love is pledging.
I'm glad her neck's not like the swan's,
Which it employs for dredging.

Yes, I'm in love, alas! and when
One's that way he is "dizzy";
For in that state the best of men—
They say, nine out of every ten—
With foolishness get busy.
In love, man's sure he's "It"—and then
He weds and wonders, "Is he?"

—*Nixon Waterman*

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